

## Regrouping Aggies make pitch for 1990 season

### Johnson ready to lead No. 15 squad into question-filled year

By ALAN LEHMANN  
Of The Battalion Staff

Texas A&M hasn't been hit this hard by the draft since World War II.

All eight starting position players from last season are gone. Three of the top five pitchers also have left.

Yet, baseball coach Mark Johnson doesn't think of the 1990 season, which begins Friday at 3 p.m. when the Aggies host the University of Texas-Arlington, as a rebuilding year.

"I don't like to use the term 'rebuilding,'" Johnson said. "I think we (will) regroup. We had enough good athletes on the bench last year that I don't think it's going to be a total rebuilding year."

The Aggies shared the conference championship with Arkansas, but won the Southwest Conference Tournament. This year, the Aggies again will have to contend with perennial powerhouses Arkansas and Texas. The Longhorns advanced to the championship game of the College World Series before being beaten by Wichita State last year.

After finishing last season ranked in the Top 10, the Aggies start 1990 ranked No. 15 by ESPN/Collegiate Baseball, and No. 24 by Baseball America.

A&M was ranked No. 1 for 11 weeks last season. Obviously, Johnson doesn't want to judge this year's team by last year's 58-7 squad.

But Johnson admits that in his 21 years of coaching, he's never lost his entire starting lineup. So, he relents and uses the "I" word sometimes.

"You'd have to, by the layman's term, say this is a rebuilding year because we've lost a whole lot of guys," Johnson said.

Still, he's not bitter about losing so many players — three of them juniors — to the Major League's June amateur draft.

"I don't resent it or consider it a disloyalty for a junior to sign," Johnson said. "That's really their negotiating year. If they get a good draft, that's their chance to see if they can get a pretty good bonus. The senior year, you don't have that opportunity."

Each of the 11 Aggies drafted and signed last year improved their draft status after their career at A&M.

"It was a statement to us that guys are getting better in our program," he said. "Anytime your program reaches a level where the professional teams are interested in your talent, then it says that you're bringing in some good players."

Johnson has brought in 15 new players this season to augment the dozen returning. Six of the new recruits come from high school and nine from junior colleges.

But Johnson isn't panicking about the lack of experience. Four of the JUCO transfers come from 1989 national champion San Jacinto, and Johnson is confident that they have enough experience to play at the major-college level.

All four have won spots in the Aggie starting lineup. Outfielders Chad Broussard and Dan Robinson will be counted on for offensive power, Johnson said.

Pitchers Jason Bullard and Rich Robertson will join the Aggie pitching staff.

Broussard put on a hitting display last season, when he led the Gators to the JUCO national title. He hit .386 with 15 home runs and 71 RBI.

Robinson wasn't a slouch either. He hit .360 with 16 HRs and 83 RBI



Coach Mark Johnson (r) will lead his young Aggies into the new season, which starts Friday when they host UTA.

Photo by Phelan M. DeB...

last season, and holds the Gators' career records for home runs, hits, runs and RBI.

Bullard, who posted an 8-1 record

last year, will pitch relief this season. Pitching Coach Jim Lawler said that Bullard has a shot at the stopper's

role left by the graduated Scott Cent...

tala. Robertson, who has won a spot in the Aggies' starting rotation, had an 11-2 record last season at San Ja-

cinto. Of returning Aggies, only those who played major roles last year. This

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Photo by Jay Janner

Last year's 58-7 squad jumps for joy after beating Arkansas to grab a share of the SWC championship.

## Trying to get back to winning ways... Ags in 1989 fill script for storybook season

By RICHARD TIJERINA  
Of The Battalion Staff

58-7. Texas A&M baseball coach Mark Johnson will have his hands full trying to regroup from last year's season, which saw the Aggies ranked No. 1 for 11 weeks and miss the College World Series by one game.

Eight position starters and one starting pitcher are gone from last year's talented squad, and Johnson will be banking on big contributions from junior college transfers, and hoping last year's reserves can step into starting roles this year and perform well.

But it's going to be a tall order for the Aggies. After finishing last season ranked No. 2 in Baseball America and No. 9 in ESPN/Collegiate Baseball, the Aggies start the 1990 season with a No. 24 ranking.

And a lot of memories.

And heroes. John Byington, Chuck Knoblauch, Terry Taylor, Mike Easley, Kirk Thompson, Keith Langston and Scott Centala won't be back at Olsen Field in 1990, but they leave behind a legacy this year's team can certainly look up to.

What a season 1989 was. It ended in dramatic fashion. The Aggies fell short in extra innings to miss their trip to Omaha, Neb. for the College World Series for the third year in a row.

Fitting in a way, for the Aggies seemingly lived and died in late innings all season. When the game was on the line, the Aggies always seemed to have someone come through with a clutch hit or outstanding defensive play to save the game.

But on May 28, 1989, fate caught up with them.

Hosting the regional tournament, the Aggies were No. 1 in the nation and the top seed. In the tournament final, A&M had two chances to defeat Louisiana State and advance to the eight-team World Series.

But in the first game, All-American pitcher Ben McDonald tossed a 10-hitter in a 13-5 Tigers win. The Aggies had lost only two games at home in 1989 before that, and A&M players were confident their luck streak would continue the next day in the final game.

But their luck was to run out. The next day's game would extend into extra innings. But the Aggies, who had won so many times earlier in the season in overtime, couldn't pull the victory out when it counted the most against a talented LSU team.

A&M lost, 5-4, in the 11th inning.

"We've been back so many times," A&M

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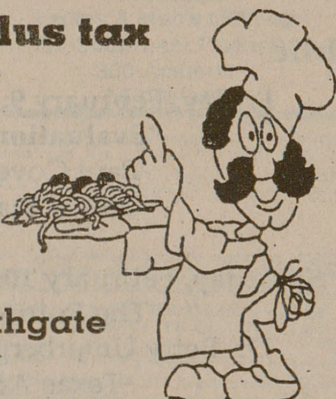
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